Holbrook Building
58 Sutter Street
San Francisco
San Francisco County
California

HABS No. CA-2186

PHOTOCRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20240

HABS
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HOLBROOK BUILDING

Location: 58 Sutter Street
Assessor's Block 289, Lot 4, San Francisco.

Present Owner: Moraine Investments

Present Occupant: Vacant

Present Use: Vacant

Statement of Significance: The Holbrook Building is a significant early post-fire office building designed by a major San Francisco architectural firm. It is distinguished by the integrity of its facade and contribution to the streetscape.

The Holbrook Building was rated "B" in Splendid Survivors, the survey of historic buildings by the Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage. This designation implies that the building is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. It also is rated "3" on a scale of 0 - 5 for worthwhile buildings in the San Francisco Planning Department's Architectural Quality Survey. The survey notes the quality of its cornice and top story as a contribution to the streetscape. Also recognized is its role as a transition in scale between the neighboring Anglo and London Paris National Bank Building and nearby highrise structures.

PART I HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection: 1912

Architect: MacDonald & Applegarth

Historical Narrative

The Holbrook Building was constructed in 1912 for Charles H. Holbrook, an early San Francisco business pioneer and financial investor. The architect was one of the most prominent post-fire San Francisco firms, MacDonald & Applegarth. General contractor for the building was Williams Brothers & Henderson. Hicks & Folte served as the electrical contractor.

The Holbrook Building has served a wide variety of tenants. Notable among these have been the offices of the Anglo and London Paris National Bank (The Crocker Anglo Bank) and the Bank of Tokyo.

Much of the building's historical significance is derived from its association with its builder, Charles Holbrook and the architects Kenneth MacDonald and George Applegarth.

Biographical Information - Charles Holbrook

The Holbrook Building was built for Charles H. Holbrook (1830-1925), an early San Francisco business pioneer and financial investor. Holbrook was born in New Hampshire and migrated to California where he participated in the 1850 Gold Rush. He joined the firm of J. D. Lord & Co. in Sacramento which manufactured stoves and metal piping. In 1857 he moved to San Francisco as a partner in the firm of Holbrook, Merrill & Stetson (a reorganization of J. D. Lord & Co.). Located at 6th and Townsend, the company produced stoves, piping, plumbing materials, and other non-structural metal work used in rebuilding structures after the 1906 fire. In his later years Holbrook was listed as a investment financier. He also attracted some public notoriety as a long-time survivor of the Gold Rush era.

Biographical Information - George Adrian Applegarth

George Adrian Applegarth (1877-1972) was born in Oakland, California. His architectural career began with an apprenticeship with his uncle, George Sanders of Wright & Sanders, a San Francisco architecture firm. Encouraged by architect Bernard Maybeck, Applegarth attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts from 1902 to 1906. Returning to San Francisco, he formed a partnership with Kenneth MacDonald, Jr., whom he had known at the Beaux Arts. Lasting for six years, this partnership became one of the most important architectural firms in the reconstruction period after the 1906 earthquake and fire. After this time, it appears that Applegarth practiced alone. Nearly all of his commissions were in San Francisco or the Bay area.

Applegarth is known for the range of works which he skillfully executed. Innovative commercial structures such as the Sachs Building (132-140 Geary Street) and the Holbrook Building show his skill at organizing large masonry and glass facades. In contrast, grand residential structures in Pacific Heights and Presidio Heights show his ability to utilize classical forms in a practical manner.

The work for which Applegarth is most noted is the California Palace of the Legion of Honor. Later notable works include the Moraga Town Plan and the Downtown Center Parking Garage (Mason and O'Farrell Streets), an innovation in contemporary design.

The Eastern Outfitting Company (1019-1021 Market Street) and the Forrest Building (1053 Market Street) are the finest surviving examples of the joint efforts of Applegarth and MacDonald. Most of their work was commercial and included automobile facilities, office buildings and commercial lofts, few of which remain.

Biographical Information - Kenneth MacDonald, Jr.

Kenneth MacDonald, Jr. (1881-1940) was born in Louisville, Kentucky. He received a degree in Civil Engineering from Vanderbilt University in 1900 and went on to the University of Pennsylvania where he graduated in

architecture. He then studied at the Ecole des Beaux Arts under Jean Pascal. Upon returning to the United States he entered the office of Richard Hunt's Sons. MacDonald came to San Francisco in 1906 and entered into practice with George Applegarth. The firm was known as MacDonald & Applegarth, with offices in the Call Building. In addition to his association with Applegarth, he also worked with George Kelham and Maurice Couchet. Early biographical accounts list at least 72 buildings to his credit in San Francisco, with others in Los Angeles and other parts of California.

PART II ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General Statement

1. Architectural Merit and Interest: The Holbrook Building is of architectural merit based on the integrity of its facade, particularly its richly ornamented cornice level.

2. Condition of Fabric: Good (to be demolished)

3. Summary Description: The Holbrook Building is a seven-story office building, with a basement and large central lightwell. Its facade is organized by nine regular bays and three horizontal divisions including a street level with mezzanine, a four-story shaft and a one-story cornice level. The street level facade originally had full double bay glazed storefronts with square corner piers framing the central entranceway. This level has been remodeled into a series of recessed glazed storefronts with square corner piers framing the central entranceway. The single Ionic distyle-in-antis of the entranceway has been removed. The mezzanine level above is articulated by squat pilasters with stylized fluting. It was crowned by an anthemion cornice which was removed in 1975. At the shaft portion of the building, each window of the floor levels is separated from the one above by a paneled spandrel with sections and an urn.

The cornice level of the building is distinguished from the four-story shaft by its elaborate ornamentation. The arched window moldings are articulated by paired composite engaged columns which are faced with

winged putti, somewhat in the manner of a Greek herm. The full Corinthian entablature, supported by the columns and forming the main cornice, includes a rinceaux frieze, console brackets supporting the corona which is decorated with paterae along the soffit, and a cymatium of lion masks with an anthemion crested molding. The main cornice is of galvanized iron. It and the secondary cornice below the top floor wrap around from the front of the building to the lightwell in the center of the eastern facade (above the Anglo and London Paris National Bank).

In general, the integrity of the Holbrook Building remains intact with the exception of street level remodeling (1948 and later), the removal of the minor mezzanine cornice (1975), and the addition of a fire escape to the east bay of the facade (1960).

Detailed Description of Exterior

1. Foundation: Reinforced concrete.

2. Wall Construction: The exterior walls are reinforced concrete finished in cement plaster with cast concrete ornament. The interior light court is covered with white glazed ceramic tile.

3. Structural Systems: Reinforced concrete with reinforced concrete walls and floors.

4. Porches, Stoops, Etc.: Not applicable.

5. Openings, Doorways, Windows: A central bay entrance is framed by square corner piers. The original glass-paneled entrance doors have been replaced with new doors of glass and aluminum. Windows are double-hung single pane wood sash set in a flat wall plane. On the south elevation, they are paired in each bay and at each floor level. Each pair is surrounded by a classical molding and divided by a colonette. The cornice level windows at the seventh story windows are topped by single pane fanlights. Three light courts provide additional interior light. The central light court, measuring 38' by 39', extends from the second floor to the top of the building. Skylights on the second floor

roof allow light to penetrate to the second floor. The light courts on the east and west walls are 6 feet deep and 36 feet long. They extend from the basement to the top of the building.

6. Roof - Shape and Covering: The roof is flat with a single mechanical penthouse.

Detailed Description of Interior

1. Floor Plans: The entrance lobby is a small square space panelled in marble. Its only decoration is provided by the brass mail box and the marble stairway with its brass balustrade. The remaining first floor space on either side of the lobby was used for commercial space. The six office levels have a donut shape plan with the lightwell in the middle surrounded by offices, a central corridor, and offices along the outside wall with exterior windows. The original plan contained 250 separate office spaces ranging in size from approximately 200 to 80 square feet. The original interior floor plan has been modified to varying degrees on each floor but many of the original walls remain. The basement housed mechanical equipment, storage space, a boiler room with vaults.

2. Stairways: The main stairway at the first floor is of curved white marble with a bronze and oak handrail. The stair is open through the building although above the first floor it is simpler in design with marble treads and risers and cast metal balustrades with posts. Two minor enclosed stairways are located in the rear half of the building.

3. Flooring: Originally the individual office floors were covered with heavy "battleship" linoleum. Today most of the floors have been covered with new asphalt tile or carpeting. All corridor floors are of rectangular marble tile which is in excellent condition.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish: The lobby is paneled in Tavernelle marble. Corridor walls on the office levels are wainscotted with California Columbia marble with a smooth plaster finish above. Ceilings in many of

the offices and in the lobby have been lowered and covered with acoustical tile.

5. Doorways and Doors and Windows: A distinctive feature of the lobby is the arched doorway and oak door covered with a brass sheathing in a rosette design. On the office levels many of the heavy oak doors with single pane hammered glass panels still exist. Operable transom windows above the doors and fixed transom level windows along the upper floor hallways provide additional light for the hallways.

6. Interior Trim: Marble pilasters provide decoration in the lobby. On the office floors oak trim is used in the hallways and individual offices.

7. Hardware: The original entrance doors and elevator grillwork of ornamental bronze at the lobby have been replaced. The bronze mail chute and box and building directory are intact. Each office was fitted with wooden wardrobes and enclosed washbasins supplying both hot and cold water. The individual oak office doors have bronze locks and knobs.

8. Mechanical and Electrical Equipment: The building used steam heat with individually controlled radiators in each room. It has an electric lighting system. Few of the original fixtures of which remain. In most public spaces the lighting was converted to fluorescent lighting in conjunction with lowering the ceilings. Three manually operated Otis elevators originally served the building but two were replaced in 1955 with automatic Westinghouse equipment. Four sidewalk to basement service elevators remain.

Site and Surroundings

1. Orientation and General Setting: The Holbrook Building faces south on Sutter Street. On the east is the Anglo and London Paris National Bank Building, to the north is the Standard Oil Bulding. Together, these buildings make up a cluster of distinctive structures in the downtown San Francisco financial district.

PART III PROJECT INFORMATION

Plans call for the demolition of the Holbrook Building in Fall 1981. This historical documentation of the Holbrook Building was completed by Charles Hall Page & Associates, Inc. in September 1981. It is one portion of the historical/architectural recordation of the Holbrook Building prepared for Citicorp that also includes photodocumentation and documentation of existing original drawings. The recordation conforms with the standards of the National Architectural and Engineering Record, U.S. Department of the Interior.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

The Architect and Engineer: May 1913; July 1923; January 1938.

The Foundation for San Francisco's Architectural Heritage. Building and Architect files.

San Francisco City Planning Commission. "One Sansome Building Environmental Impact Report," April 1981.